

PRESS CONFERENCE:

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Multi-National Force-Iraq**

DATE:

OCTOBER 10, 2007

TRANSCRIBED BY:

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DEBORAH HAYNES FROM THE TIMES OF LONDON

REPORTERS 1-7

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

BERGNER: As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Good afternoon everyone. It's my pleasure to be joined by my good friend, Major General Doug Stone, who's going to talk specifically about his responsibilities in Iraq. And before I introduce him, I'd just like to make a couple opening remarks. Reporting in recent days has noted more barbaric action by al-Qaida as they have increased attacks during Ramadan using indiscriminate violence, murder, and intimidation, which exposes al-Qaida in Iraq for what they truly are, a violent extremist organization. This spike in violence largely targets those it sees as the most threatening to it, Iraqi security force leaders, concerned local citizens, and other local citizens in areas that are in the process of rejecting al-Qaida. This reflects their worry that other Sunni areas in Iraq are following what was done in al-Anbar. And it indicates their concern that locals are no longer supporting them. The attacks of course only hardened the rejection of al-Qaida in Iraq in such areas. And we are seeing tribes now in Salahuddin, Ninawa, and At Tamin provinces rising up and turning against the violence of al-Qaida in Iraq. Even amidst the rising attacks, programs to support local citizens who are stepping forward to protect their communities are growing and expanding across sectarian lines. These citizens are making courageous efforts to stop the violence and to begin working with security forces and their government. The government of Iraq also continues to take courageous steps to work with these groups and citizens, to accept qualified candidates into the Iraqi security forces and pursue confidence building measures that can improve

prospects for reconciliation. North of Baghdad near Muqdadiyah, trust and concerned local citizens is now factor encouraging both Sunni and Shia residents to move back into their homes. In many other areas both Shia and Sunnis are involved in concerned local citizen groups, as in Musayyib and Nascangariyah south of Baghdad. Confidence building measures are continuing to address the local security issues in both Shia and Sunni communities and helping Iraqi citizens address their security needs at the local level. And we continue to work closely with Iraqi security forces and the government of Iraq in those endeavors. Finally, we would like to congratulate the Iraqi security forces for their effective operations that resulted in a safe and successful religious commemoration in Najaf, another example of Iraqi security forces planning and directing large scale operations to ensure the security for their people. And now I'd like to introduce my friend Doug Stone. It's a pleasure to have him here. He is the commander of the coalition task force that oversees detainee operations throughout Iraq. He has served extensively in southwest Asia and has recently served in support of operations in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the past few months, you have heard of and in many cases seen first hand the programs that General Stone has initiated to not only better fulfill our responsibility for humane and transparent detention operations but also to better prepare detainees to be integrated back into Iraqi society. Effective detention operations require accountability and they require oversight. Coalition detention facilities receive frequent and

recurring inspections that provide oversight from a number of organizations, including the government of Iraq, the Defense Department, and agencies like the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Red Crescent. We take our responsibilities very seriously and are committed to both broad transparency and public accountability. That is part of the reason that General Stone is here today, as well as to give you an update on the initiatives underway to care for those who are in custody and prepare them to return to Iraqi society better equipped to contribute to the future of Iraq. And now it's my pleasure to introduce Major General Stone.

STONE: Kevin, thank you. It's a real honor to be hear, and it's a pleasure to address the Iraqi people. And if you don't mind, I'd like to start in a brief address in Arabic.

BERGNER: And let me just remind folks because we don't generally do this. So those of you who aren't wearing a headset might want to go and put one on so you can hear the reverse translation of what you usually get. Shukran.

STONE: Ramadan Kareem. Speaking in Arabic.

INT: Ramadan Kareem. Welcome everyone. I am General Stone, the official of the detainees for the multinational forces. I am pleased to see you today. And I'd like to introduce to you the programs of our detention

processes. We provide many services in our facilities in cooperation with international laws and human rights standards. We are running clear and transparent operation, which is open to inspections by many agencies like groups like the ICRS, who make special and organized visits of the Iraqi human rights which make an inspection...and an army inspector also makes two visits. And also an organized inspection by the...and...This is what we present, or provide. We provide what the inmates need of clothing, food, water for drinking and also washing, in addition to medical and health care. Education program we provide for the inmate in addition to the education the tech programs such as the Dar al-Hikmah for juveniles and adults literacy programs in accordance with Iraqi Ministry of Education curriculum. We are building a projected brick and textiles factories for detainees to work at, so that the detainees could work at them. The purpose of these programs is to prepare the detainees for release to their families. And thank you.

STONE: With that I'd like to change over to English and our first slide. It's important I think to point out that first and foremost that everything that happens in detention in Iraq is done so under the open and transparent eyes of many agencies. And General Bergner has mentioned already the International Red Cross, but I will tell you it's many others as well. Our own army facilities, Department of Defense, Iraqi Ministry of Human rights also is welcome. And frequently we have the press at our detainee

facilities as well. Our goals and our activities are absolutely clear and absolutely transparent. And our facilities are open to inspection by any agency that we in the federal government believe is credible. Now these agencies are welcomed because they are windows for the world, just as you are, to view our mission and offer their guidance. And that's why we're here today, to ensure that you that there are no secrets that go on in detention. They are all open, and they are all transparent. We see this as an important responsibility. In fact, we see it as an obligation to the people of Iraq. In our medical, you'll know that all of our detainees receive the exact same medical care that General Bergner and I receive. Same thing for dental. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Whatever the medical condition is, their care will be exactly be to the same standard that General Bergner and mine are and any service member's in Iraq would be. And all the medical and dental care is free of charge, as is all the medicine, as are all the checkups, as are all the treatments and the medications are delivered to them. We provide upon entry and throughout the process a basic screening and X-ray for tuberculosis and lung disease. And our medical providers conduct a medical history on every single detainee to ensure that whatever injury, illness, or disease they have is tracked and cared for, looked at through our labs and radiological studies. There's an assessment based, and approved on U.S. standards of medical practice. Our facilities are the highest level possible in the world. They provide the exact same care of surgery, extensive treatment, and

monitoring as any other service member would receive in the country.

And as for food, the food is provided in a culturally specific meal according to Islamic law. Halal meals are provided. And of course during the religious observances as we have now, we monitor and change the timing of those three meals a day. All the meals meet or exceed international standards as reviewed by the many agencies who visit us.

Water is important. It's important in many ways, as we know in Islam. Detainees are provided all the water they could ever drink and all that they need to both wash for prayer and in order to take showers. It's important for our detainees to have contact with their families. And we've established and built new visitor centers for those families to visit and to interact. And when they're too far, as they frequently are, when their detainee is down in Camp Bucca, we now have set up videoconferencing capability so that they can now come in, talk to their detainee via videoconference, and increasingly on cell phones as well. And when we're unable to meet the demand, the International Committee of Red Cross helps bridge that gap with a permanent on-station team who work to ferry mail back and forth and to ensure that detainees both receive and are able to send mail. I apologize I'm not following what...let me focus for a second on the education benefits. You may find it interesting that detainees themselves engage in an interest level in education that to me is unparalleled. More than 7,000 detainees today have completed their education up through the fifth grade. We have more than 8,000, or a third

of all of those that are in detention, seek out education and are increasingly wanting to go higher. So much is the demand that we have exceeded our ability to hire qualified teachers. And now 173 of our detainees who are educated at the appropriate level are helping to teach their fellow detainees in the programs that we have. We will soon be moving up to the high school level at the demand of the detainees. For the youth that we have. All of our youth are in school. They all attend Arabic, math, civics, English, geography. And for the youth who are here at Dar al-Hikmah, they also have sports programs. Ultimately, we want all detainees who are no longer an imperative risk to Iraqi and coalition forces to be released. And a detainee goes through today a personal interview with members of our forces who ask them what were the conditions upon which they were contained. And only then after they are convinced amongst each other that the threat will no longer be there do they go forward and take a pledge. This pledge is an Iraqi pledge, a pledge before an Iraqi judge, frequently with a family member present. I'm pleased to tell you that in the more than the thousand of those who have gone through this program and taken the pledge, not one has returned to threaten Iraqi or coalition forces. We recognized that the rule of law is a key part of the due process for all detainees. Before we go to questions, I want to make sure you know how much we appreciate the work the Iraqi government has been doing with and for us. There are many ministries who have engaged in providing us services, who have provided us with counsel, who have

engaged with us in terms of the various programs we have. And that we have toured in all of organizations. And at the highest level of the Iraqi government, we have made our programs clear to them. And they have been supportive at every calling. I want to thank you, the members of the press. Because without you, our ability to reach out to the family; the families would not know the programs that their detainees are involved with. And I look forward to the questions that you'll ask to clarify for these families. And I look forward to the opportunity in the future to tell you more about the programs. And then lastly on behalf of an awful lot of us who've been serving with the detainees for some time, I want to thank the detainees themselves, who after going through this process have returned to Iraqi society and who themselves have chosen to build a better Iraq, who have chosen to no longer engage in the insurgent activities that may have been brought them to the condition that we met them in the first place. With that, I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

BERGNER: Shukran, and great opportunity to talk to General Stone and to get to the details.

REP1: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: It's an Iraqi newspaper. What is the total number of the detainees that have been released in Ramadan month until now?

STONE: The average number of detainee releases through every day of Ramadan has exceeded fifty per day. The number right now we believe is a little closer to sixty, but fifty is a good number to use. And that is everyday in Ramadan that was, by the way, also true in the days before Ramadan. And it is our intent, based on the number who have gone through our process of meeting with the board and interviewing to continue that number should it warrant itself.

REP2: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Hora TV. My question is to General Bergner about the military operations in Baghdad and south of Baghdad with the help of the tribes. But the spokesman of Operation Fardh al-Qanoon Qassim Atta said that some of the groups that supported have been suspended because some insurgents went into these groups and became part of them. And the second question is to General Stone is about the possibility of the MNF in running the prisons, are they capable of stopping the problems inside the Iraqi prisons, in particular the Iraqi officials revealed cases of torture in these prisons and abuse of detainees.

BERGNER: Can I ask you specifically what area you're reporting is coming from. Which area south of Baghdad are you hearing those reports.

REP2: Like in south of Baghdad near Iskandariyah and also west of Baghdad near al-Amiriyah and Abu Ghraib neighborhood.

BERGNER: Shukran. Actually I spoke to the commander of the multinational division center this morning, and I heard his assessment and his report of the concerned local citizens, their courage, their continued commitment to help protect their communities, to help improve security at the local level and to help work closely with Iraq security forces and with the coalition to enforce this. And his assessment was very clear, that those groups continue to show great courage, they continue to work closely with our forces and Iraqi forces. And they are continuing to deal with the kinds of challenges that are natural in this situation. It is natural that there will be attempts to infiltrate these groups at the local level. And so the Iraqi forces and the coalition forces are helping tribal leaders, Iraqi government leaders at the local level and these concerned local citizens to deal with that where it represents itself. But he continued to be very impressed by the courage and commitment of the concerned local citizens at those levels as they work through those kinds of challenges. Shukran.

STONE: I thank you for the question. Let me first give you what I think is an honest assessment. And that is that we are still working on making our programs the best in the world. And our focus at this point is on the detainees who are really under my responsibility, but we are also able to

train more than 2,000 Iraqi correctional officers in the process of doing that. We've established two academies. Those academies turn out some of the best Iraqi correctional facility officers in the Middle East. And many of them, after service with us, then move into the Iraqi correctional system. And we know already that when they're employed they have effect. We also engage in assisting the Ministry of Human Rights and others to conduct inspections. We help out [unintelligible] in two places so that many of these concerns can be addressed. But we remain as part of MNFI in a position to assist, and we will as time goes on in any manner that the Iraqi government might ask us.

REP3: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Al-Safir newspaper and the immediate coordinator also. Question to General Bergner and General Stone. After issuing the death verdict of Ali Hassan Majid, the former Defense Minister, did the Iraqi government ask you to deliver those to...and, or had the two cases had been separated?

BERGNER: I'll start. It's my understanding that the Iraqi government continues to consider the judicial issues, the constitutional issues associated with their completion of the sentence that was arrived at. And that is an Iraqi decision that's in the Iraqi review process. And that is exactly where it is. It does not involve the coalition to my knowledge. Anything to add to that?

STONE: No, that's correct. In this case, the prisoners – and these are prisoners as opposed to detainees – are being held and will await the verdict from the Prime Minister and the government of Iraq. And when they tell us, we will then release them to their responsibilities.

REP3: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: So the defendants are with you now? And the Iraqi government asked you to deliver them to the Iraqi government? Will they be delivered to the Iraqi government, Ali Hassan Majid? Will they be delivered?

BERGNER: Yeah they will be delivered, once the government of Iraq requests that it is our responsibility to transfer custody. So once they complete their constitutional review, their coordination of the issues the government of Iraq is considering, I'm sure they will come forward with that request. Shukran. Miguel?

MIGUEL: Thank you very much gentleman. General Stone, very brave with that Arabic on this entire crowd; it's fantastic. A couple of questions for you guys. Major General Bergner you keep talking about the Sunni-Shia citizen groups. What percentage are Sunni-Shia? We all know this is all very fraught, sort of plan, some elements of the government are very much against arming Sunnis. Is there any...how do you deal with those

sensitivities? How do you go forward during those sensitivities? But if you have a percentage of the number of mixed brigades, either brigades or groups, whatever you want to call them. And some of the sensitivities and going forward with them. And Major General Stone if you have numbers...before the surge we were supposed to see a big surge in the number of detainees. Where is that number now? Do you have a sense of how many are charged, with percentages, how many charged, how many adjudicated, how many...what's the average length of stay? I don't know how you break down the numbers. And do you have Sunni-Shia breakdown? Adult-minors? Anything that might be helpful to kind of getting the big picture of where things are. Thanks.

BERGNER: We've got good questions. First let me say that this is a very dynamic and variable circumstance, as it regards the local citizens. And I say that because what's true in a place like al-Anbar, which is largely a Sunni population, and what the circumstance is in Diyala, which is more mixed, and different districts of Baghdad where there might be a concentration of one sect and then in other districts of Baghdad where they are more mixed. It is quite variable. And it's also a situation where we see everyday concerned local citizens stepping forward, working with their tribal leaders, with the government leaders, and in many cases with the Iraqi security force leaders to organize themselves and start taking a more active role in stopping the violence in their communities. The important

point to make here is that it is increasingly cross-sectarian. And we do see concerned local citizen groups that are representative of both Sunni and Shia. And in places where one or the other may be the prominent population grouping, we see places like northern Diyala province, where even if there is a preponderance of one group in the concerned local citizens, they're working well with Iraqi security forces and coalition forces to promote cross-sectarian confidence. So even where there isn't a mixture in that group. I don't have a specific percentage of what they are. It's something that I will definitely look at and see what I can share with you, in terms of the detailed numbers. But I would also just say it's growing, and the level of commitment at the local level is one that's very impressive. It reflects tremendous courage, as I said earlier, on the part of the Iraqi people. Good question, thank you.

STONE: Let me see if I can give you some numbers on this and no doubt insight a lot of questions for more numbers. But with that, there are about 25,000, a little more, in U.S. detention today. About 83% are Sunni and 16% Shia. We have today 860 youth, and a youth is defined as somebody who is 17 and under. We have about 280 or so, maybe a little bit higher, third country nationals. That means that the far mass majority of those in detention are from Iraq. You asked a question about the legal system. I probably would like to highlight our experience with the panels, the four panels that we deal with, in the CCCI. They are fair and balanced. We

get about a 65% conviction rate on cases for those who follow this sort of thing. That's actually a pretty good number. It's a very fair number. The judges are of all sects and pay attention to the fact and the evidence. And we enjoy giving that information to the Iraqis who try the cases. The U.S. does not try the cases. They simply give the information and provide it. Those are some of the numbers. I'm not sure I captured all the ones you wanted.

BERGNER: Before we take another question could I just ask the guys in the back...am I the only one hearing the humming every time we speak? If you could turn the volume down in the back, that would be terrific.

MIGUEL: Is 25,000 at this point less than you expected?

STONE: You know, 25,000...we created a bar with three lines, sort of a lower one, the middle one and the high bar. It is just under the middle bar. So it's in the range we expected. It's about 60 detainees per day, in that ballpark. It depends on the nature of the operations. But that's about right where we thought we would be. And that's the capacity planning we've made. All of our detainees live in standards that both the army and the U.S. and ICRC standards. And that of course is how we calculate how much bed space we have. So we pay attention to this number very carefully. But it seems on balance to be right in the number where we thought.

HAYNES: Hi, I'm Deborah Haynes with the Times of London. I was wondering...Does the...this is a question for General Bergner and also a question for General Stone secondly...does the coalition have any sort of contingency plans in case there is some sort of clash between Turkey and the PKK up in the north? And do you have any plans if that does happen? And then for General Stone. The figures that you just gave...the 25,000 how does that compare with, say, a year ago? And also what is the maximum capacity for U.S. detentions? And also, what's the length of time on average a detainee is held before he is charged or released?

BERGNER: I would point out that the most important consideration as you talk about the PKK terrorist problem that the government of Turkey is challenged by is that the government of Iraq and the government of Turkey have been engaged in bilateral discussions on how they can work together to address the security problem that the PKK represents for Turkey. It's one that we take very seriously and have encouraged those bilateral discussions. It's a security challenge that the government of Iraq has increasingly engaged in with their neighbors to the north. And so it is one that the way ahead, and the most important way to deal with that is one a bilateral basis between the two governments of Iraq and Turkey. And that's where the main effort is. And that's where they've most recently had a ministerial level discussion that agreed to some specific measures where they would be

able to cooperate more effectively in dealing with those threats. We understand the loss of life the Turkish forces have suffered in the last several days. It's a very serious one. And we understand the importance that that has to the government of Turkey. And the way it's being dealt with is with bilateral coordination that's necessary between Iraq and Turkey to figure out how to cooperate on the security challenge that that represents. And that's the only level that is being pursued.

STONE: To answer your question, that's a little hard because the average moves. It sort of...what time last year. But let me tell you in general we're about 10,000 detainees than last year, and it would depend on what month, on what quarter, on what operational period. That has gone up and gone down. So I'm giving you what I think would be a good estimate of about that number given where we're at today. In terms of the maximum capacity, we have the capacity to keep on building, so I don't really look too much at what the max capacity would be. Our plan is to ensure that as a function we serve the very important role of giving the core and the forces that fight the option of not using force. And so that number is going to vary. It's going to go up and it's going to go down. And we are pledged to keep the capacity at whatever is necessary. But as I indicated earlier in my statement, we would expect those numbers to begin to go down as the detainees themselves choose to no longer be a part of a counter coalition effort. And to your question, the average number of days

depends because there are some that have been there longer and some for a very short period of time. But I use the number of about 300 days as sort of an average. But that doesn't mean that everybody's there...some are there are for a few weeks or a couple months. Some are there for longer than a couple years. And some are of course are still going through the central criminal court proceedings, which add a lot of time on.

REP4: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from a Turkish agency. Question to General Bergner.
Yesterday two women were killed in an incident by a security company in Baghdad, whether it was Blackwater or not. These incidents have actually been increasing. So how would you comment about this?

BERGNER: I would say we have the same regret for what was a very sad and tragic occurrence yesterday. And are thoughts are with the families those who were killed. I would point out that the company that was involved has expressed the same regret and is working with diplomatic security services here in the American Embassy and with the government of Iraq. And the way that I think most people would expect them to be accountable and investigate fully what happened. Shukran. Thank you.

REP4: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: What kind of company that was actually involved in this incident? Is it Blackwater company?

BERGNER: The name of the company was released. They publicly identified themselves, and I will get you the specific name. I believe it was...we will get you the specific name after this. But it was not associated with Blackwater. And I would point out this is being investigated and handled under the U.S. Embassy with their responsibilities as opposed to the Multinational Force. Thank you. Shukran.

REP5: Major General Stone. I wanted to ask you... the information you provided about the foreign nationals in the detainee facilities. I seem to recall a couple months ago some of the numbers I saw were more around the theory of a 120 or 130. Were those numbers correct? And if so, what accounts for the increase? And also, what's the breakdown of the 280? Are these mainly Saudi or Syrian? What do you see in that regard.

STONE: Well, I've been in this position for half a year. And they haven't changed markedly in the time I've been here. So it's a number of about 280. They're made up of Egyptians, Syrian, Iranian, and some Saudi Arabian. And then there's of course a number of other countries.

REP6: This program sounds really excellent, and I was wondering if you thought that in the future our military will be planning to apply these same standards of allowing human rights groups into the prisons and press transparency with regards to the Afghan detainees in Guantanamo. And will there be...do you think there will be a transfer of custody of the Afghan detainees to Karzai's government as well in the same you are transferring these detainees to the Iraqi government? Thank you.

BERGNER: I'll start off and then see if you have anything you want to follow up with. Remember that our mandate, under United Nations Security Council resolution, is to take the necessary means to help the government of Iraq achieve stability and security in Iraq. And so our specific focus, and the limits of our mission are the geographical boundaries of Iraq. That's where our tactical operations take place, it's where our reconstruction operations take place. And it is the limit of our authority and responsibility for detention operations as well. And so extrapolating the insights you've gotten from General Stone today, more broadly is not something we can do. Our focus is limited and our ability to discuss the nature of detainee policy on a scale broader than Iraq is really outside our purview. I can't really address your question, but that's the context we operate in.

REP6: I was saying that as this program becomes more successful, that perhaps the military will pick up your successes and apply them to Guantanamo as well. And you could tell them about how the detainees that come from your programs go back into society and are pretty much integrated into society. Thank you.

STONE: You know, many of the guards and many of the leadership that I actually have working for me have served at least in Guantanamo. And I think they speak very highly of the care and custody that goes on in Gitmo. But it's a very different situation. As General Bergner points out, our mandate, our authority really comes from the UN security resolution. And very precisely it comes by a big permission slip from the government of Iraq. So if the government of Iraq didn't want us to do this or didn't want to allow us to do it, we would stop instantly. So it's with that permission slip specifically in Iraq that we operate. I want to restate that the programs we have today are consistent with the mission of the Multinational Force in Iraq. We are here to assist the Iraqis to establish a stable government. And by having detainees who essentially suffer a cultural violence that are caused in part by a cycle of poverty, it hurts both the families and endangers coalition and Iraqi forces. So we believe that in detention in Iraq, that by giving the detainees an option to pursue education and skills and jobs, that in part we are breaking that cycle. And in part we are assisting the Iraqi government and all those in Iraq. I can speak at great

length about this. But I believe that the leadership that our commander shows, and the expectations that he has for what we do is bright. And I think what we're doing in Iraq is right. And I'm sure because it is, others will see that.

BERGNER: Last question. Yes, sir.

REP7: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Will there be a release, a special release of the detainees during the Eid ul-Fitr days?

STONE: The answer to that is yes there will be a release. But it will be a continuation of the same releases that we're doing today. It's our expectation that it is not good in the detention we have to have mass releases. And let me briefly explain...the detainees that go through the process, they grow in terms of their ability to understand how to work in intersectorian environment. They grow in terms of their education. And when they take their pledge and they leave. They do that as an individual. But they do it as an individual as part of their family and their larger community. And so we look at detainee releases with that in mind. And we will continue to release every single detainee who is no longer an imperative security risk. And we do not need to hold them one day longer if we are convinced they are no longer an imperative security risk. So

mass releases are interesting, but they are a cultural condition. And what we are looking for are to return all detainees back to their families and their communities the moment that we can be assured they will not reengage.

BERGNER: I'd like to thank General Stone for a very comprehensive and thoughtful presentation. I'd like to thank all of you. And Ma as-salaam. Thank you.